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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000670

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR D, INR/R/MR, I/RW, I/REC; PA  
SA/INS(FOR JWALLER); SA/PD (FOR LJIRWIN, LSCENSNY,  
WREINCKENS); SSA/PAB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAO OPRC KMDR OIIP CE LTTE

SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY - 4/14 WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

¶1. On April 14 Deputy Secretary Armitage hosted an international conference on Sri Lanka for representatives of 21 countries and 16 international organizations who gathered to discuss Sri Lanka's peace negotiations, and international assistance for the Island's development and reconstruction. As expected, the Sri Lankan media's response to the conference was quick, plentiful, and mainly positive. All of the Island's major telecasters covered the story in their 4/15 evening newscasts. On 4/16 and again on 4/17 the conference received front-page coverage in most English and vernacular dailies. As of 4/17 one English and one Tamil daily had commented editorially. Both editorials were critical of the conference, but we anticipate that the post-holiday weekender op-ed coverage will be heavy and more nuanced.

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Television.  
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¶2. In their 4/15 newscasts Sri Lankan telecaster headlined the conference with stories such as "Washington conference pledges support for Sri Lanka," "\$3 billion dollar assistance for Sri Lanka for three years from Washington conference," "In Washington conference, three years assistance agreed at the rate of \$1 billion per year," and "U.S. assistance assured in Washington conference."

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Newspapers.  
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¶3. Newspaper headlines were invariably positive. "Global support for 'momentum of peace' in Sri Lanka" and "India for united Sri Lanka" said the government-owned English daily, while the government-owned vernaculars used headlines such as "SLG's Reawakening Sri Lanka fully endorsed" and "'Last chance for peace -- if we fail, no more possibilities' says [Milinda] Moragoda," one of the GOSL's chief negotiators. The independent press was equally effusive, e.g., "\$3 billion assistance for Sri Lanka," "Plans to disburse 1 billion per annum," and "Assistance for Sri Lanka - Rs.100,000 each year, for 3 years" said the Sinhala independents, and Sri Lanka's major English independent daily, the MIRROR, wrote -- in reference to the fact that 4/14 was New Years Day in Sri Lanka -- "biggest new year gift for Lanka: aid donors pledge \$2 billion a year at Washington meeting." Even the skeptical Upali Group's headlines applauded. The Group's Sinhala daily said "Washington Conference pledges absolute support for 'Re awakening of Sri Lanka,'" while its English daily said "U.S., Japan, IMF praise peace effort," adding only that "LTTE must give up terrorism in word and deed - Armitage."

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Editorials.  
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¶4. Under the headline "Washington Summit" the independent Tamil daily SUDAR OLI focused on the absence of the LTTE, saying that the "The Washington meeting was like a wedding without the bridegroom." Excerpts:

"A meeting to encourage international cooperation and support for the peace process and development was held in Washington under the chairmanship of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage.... Representatives of 21 countries and 16 international organizations attended the meeting.... But no one represented the Tigers because the U.S. did not invite them.

"The Tigers were invited to the meeting in Norway, and they attended. They have been invited to the Tokyo Donor Summit in June, and have decided to attend. But to the Washington meeting the Liberation Tigers, the sole representatives of the Tamil people, were not invited.

"U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard [Armitage] knows that the Tigers are unhappy.... He explained why they were not invited. Because the LTTE is on the list of Terrorist Organizations, inviting them would have been illegal. He

also said that the Liberation Tigers should renounce violence and terrorism by words and deeds.

"The U.S. has already said that the LTTE has never been involved in terrorist activities in the U.S. and that they have no connection with any other international terrorist organization.

"The Liberation Tigers have signed an MOU with the government and the ceasefire has held for over a year. Six rounds of talks have been convened, and Armitage himself is happy with the progress....

"Even under these circumstances, however, he requests the Tigers to renounce violence by words and deeds. What is the meaning of this? Why is he asking those who are not involved in violence to renounce violence?

"Is it correct to label as violence the LTTE actions, taken prior to the MOU, to win the rights of the Tamil people? Then the Sri Lankan government was also engaged in violence.

"And what can we call the killing of innocent people in today's Iraqi war? Law should be equal to everyone.

"The Washington meeting was like a wedding without the bridegroom."

15. Under the headline "Cart before the Horse" the typically skeptical opposition English daily ISLAND complained that giving aid to the LTTE does not promote peace. Excerpts: "American officials such as Mr. Armitage poured ice cold water on the hot heads of the Wanni when they were not extended an invitation to the Washington Seminar although the Tigers were key players. Anton Balasingham, the LTTE spokesman... even threatened to keep out of the Tokyo Conference if they were not invited to Washington. Armitage very coolly pointed out 'We do not yet see a rational for lifting the designation as a foreign terrorist organisation. Our position is crystal clear. The LTTE must unequivocally renounce terrorism in word and deed, if we are to consider withdrawing the designation'."

"We have been very hard on the government, the Norwegian peace monitors and even western nations involved for looking away from acts of terrorism of the LTTE. The thinking behind this indulgent attitude on terrorism is that it is for the 'greater good'. Ignore these 'minor infringements' - even if they be smuggling of arms, abduction of children and sinking of ships' - for the 'Peace Process' has to be saved, it is claimed. But one year and four months of the 'Peace Process' have passed and terrorism continues unabated." "Mr. Armitage has said: 'Indeed. I believe that negotiations.....have reached an important point, on where an infusion of international support could add an unstoppable force to this momentum of peace'. We agree that continued moral support would indeed yield positive results but material assistance to a region, run by a group still committed to terrorism will only add momentum to their barbaric ways of governance and not to peace."

"While it is extremely desirable and tempting to commence rehabilitation and reconstruction as soon as possible, it will be prudent on the part of all those who want the people of the North and East to live under a pluralistic democratic regime to hold back this assistance till a final agreement has been signed and a durable peace achieved."

"Pumping of massive assistance before democracy and a durable peace is established into regions under terrorism is tantamount to placing the cart before the horse."

Wills